

As the presbytery enters 2011, it is our sense that it is a Season of... Changes, Challenges and Choices - and God's Opportunities and Provision

As we embrace God's opportunities to learn and adapt, we are seeking to choose the mind of Christ and to stay centered in Christ, keeping 'the main thing the main thing' when anxiety and fears can distort our thinking and prioritizing and we can be tempted to allow the *urgent* to be confused with or sideline the *important*.

The 'main thing'- Living our vision, seeking to embody--creatively, faithfully, and fruitfully-- God's preferred future as an outpost of Christ's church called, gathered, equipped, and sent in Montana. In reliance on Prayer, Scripture and the Holy Spirit, it is our call with you to develop and nurture missional, disciple-making, disciple-sending congregations and leaders. Together, we seek to help congregations and each other be all we can be in Christ -- joining Christ's mission. Fulfilling Christ's vision and call is not merely about the words of a statement. It is about cooperating with God transforming who we *are* and *how we live*, for Jesus' sake, sent out in these changing and challenging times in Montana and around the world. Christ's vision is fulfilled in our faith-filled practices; in what we do as disciples individually and together; in networking, collaborating and deepening our relationships; and in adapting our processes and structures for more fruitful, faithful missional ministry in 2011.

Changes and challenges - *"When your oven is jammed and your bread is burning -- that is when you will learn to use an oven. People can't learn in a classroom. True learning occurs 'just in time.' "* Tom McMakin, COO, Great Harvest Bread Co. (Now in Bozeman and attending First Presbyterian Church)

I.Changes impinging from outside the presbytery:

- a. The Synod is in transition, wondering what God has next. It decreased staff, discontinued its responsibility for managing the mission funding & per capita, expecting Presbytery staff to pick up the slack and develop the processes and materials for doing so. 4 presbyteries face imminent change.
- b. General Assembly is scaling adapting and scaling back staff, expecting presbyteries to assume some of what the GA level has previously done, including more informing and processing online. This necessitates that we do more as staff, committees and informing presbytery and churches of changes.
- c. The proposed New Form of Government (nFoG), if adopted, will mean a near-complete revision of our polity and functioning at the session, presbytery/CoM, synod and GA level. For example, the nFoG mandates that every council (session, presbytery, synod, GA) develop its own administrative manual, as we must all redecide many areas covered now. The presbytery takes on a new regulatory function reading all these manuals, among other extensive requirements. See <http://oga.pcusa.org/formofgovernment/pdfs/advisory-handbook-aug-09.pdf>
- d. With the average age in the PCUSA now 62, many churches continue to try to see and react to and take the Gospel, to a culture that is no longer. Teens (see Almost Christian by Kenda Dean) and trends indicate we are gradually becoming "irrelevant" in the eyes of the culture. Through the visioning process and living Christ's vision we are seeking to change.join Christ in his mission in 2011.
- e. The unsettling economic conditions in our culture and region are a spiritual concern and opportunity. How do we do mission and ministry differently, prioritizing for these times? How we "do church" is changing yet Christ's call to BE disciple-making, disciple-sending communities is timeless. Will the presbytery and sessions continue to choose to be proactive and hopeful in Christ in addressing these changing conditions, or simply erode and die?

We see the great need for our small presbytery to find the leading and working of the Holy Spirit in these confusing times – to remain focused on the call of God to encourage and equip disciple-making, disciple-sending leaders and congregations and to go out joining in Christ's mission together. But the expectations and devolving

work from above could completely consume the presbytery's and staff's energies and resources. (Urgent vs. important) We all will have to prioritize so that the important priorities are accomplished and the lesser let go.

II.Changes Emerging within the Presbtyery...

- a. The Vision Team in Phase III of our journey seeks to lead, encourage, equip us to think differently about vision, mission and ministry. The presbytery's calling now is to evaluate and align who we are, what we do with our Vision. We will be encouraged to continue to develop new practices of how we come together and live together; new ways of deepening our relationships and building bridges across congregational and various lines; new ways of how we will address change and decisions; and finally some adjustment in our structure to support the first three categories. *Check with Ric Tieman and Debbie Blackburn for more info, stay abreast of materials and their reports.*
- b. Changes in pastoral leadership. After a period of relative pastoral stability in the presbytery, the following churches are in pastoral change or without confirmed pastoral leadership: Poplar, Miles City, Hysham, Jordan, White Sulphur Springs, West Yellowstone. First, Billings, Deer Lodge and Forsyth have recently seen the calling of new pastoral leadership. God is leading in each of these situations, but helping churches and pastors in change is taking a great deal of training and time from CoM and the presbytery staff at present. *Check with Neva Rathbun for more info.*
- c. The Holy Spirit seems to be reigniting a work with the youth in some congregations, the presbytery and the Camp at Westminster Spires. *Check with Curt Kochner and Susan Thomas for details, Jody re Rockhaven.*
- d. Transitions in presbytery leadership. We gratefully acknowledge the service of Fran Babcock as Council Moderator for the last six years and welcome Leon Rathbun to the role in the days ahead. Additionally, fully half of our committees are receiving new moderators and council are new. New people... new dreams... new working relationships...God's new opportunities.

III.So – It is a Season of Changes, Challenges and Choices - and God's Opportunities! Being faithful and fruitful. But in this season, impacting all presbyteries, our years of growth and work on the visioning journey seem to be moving us into position to step into the future "as bright as the promises of God" (Wm Cary) And some of those steps?

- e. ENGAGE – Coming in February and March into the summer of 2011. In keeping with, as result of, our vision statement, Yellowstone was given a grant from The Office of Church Growth & Evangelism and Eric Hoey and Ray Jones will be providing training and coaching for disciplemaking and evangelism with congregations that so desire it. (See separate handout)
- f. The Vision Team continues to equip and work with Council to help the presbytery navigate change and better position to join God in God's mission here, regionally, nationally.
- g. Asking tough questions, adjusting and exploring new possibilities such as: The Mission Committee has some exciting initiatives coming forward, including networking congregations with similar passions in mission or a request from Sr. Hi students for an international mission trip, presbytery wide, perhaps.

IV.It is a Season of God's Provision. General Fund balance of presbytery remained virtually the same as end of 2009. We were budgeted to raise \$44,000 towards our salary and ministry expenses in 2010. We are grateful for God's provision of a little over \$47,000. What an encouragement and a challenge to us all to continue to believe God is calling and guiding us, and we are responding, as we move into this new year, living into God's vision and joining Christ in *Christ's* ministry & mission.

Grateful for our partnership with you in this, God's work in Yellowstone,

George and Kathy Goodrich